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Request for the inclusion of an additional item in the agenda of the fifty-seventh session

International Year of Rice, 2004

Letter dated 22 November 2002 from the Permanent Representative of the Philippines to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

In accordance with rule 15 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, I have the honour to request the inclusion in the agenda of the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly of an item entitled "International Year of Rice, 2004".

Pursuant to rule 20 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, I have attached an explanatory memorandum (annex I) in support of the above request and a draft resolution (annex II).

It would be appreciated if the present letter and its annexes could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly.

(*Signed*) Alfonso T. **Yuchengco**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex I

Explanatory memorandum

International Year of Rice, 2004

Importance of rice

1. Rice is a staple food for more than half of the world's population. The amount of rice consumed annually ranges from 100 to 240 kilograms per person. More than two billion people in Asia alone derive 60 to 70 per cent of their caloric intake from rice. Thus, the importance of rice in relation to food security and socio-economic stability is self-evident.

2. Rice is becoming increasingly popular in Africa and the Americas. In high-income countries in the Near East, Europe and North America, rice is considered a healthy and tasty food and its consumption is expanding.

3. The importance of rice is progressively recognized not only for its nutritional value but also as an integral part of political and social features of many societies. Rice production and post-harvest activities also provide employment for several hundred million people who work directly in rice production or in related support services.

4. Rapid acceleration of rice production over the last three decades was a primary contributor to improvements in world food security. However, there are still about 800 million people suffering from food deficits, most of them residing in areas that are dependent upon rice production for food, income and employment.

Trends and projections of rice production

5. During the early 1990s, several scientists warned of a pending crisis. The rice production growth rate decelerated from above 2.5 per cent during the 1980s to only 1.1 per cent per annum during the early 1990s due to the slow growth in yield and limited expansion of production areas. Rice demand in 2030 is projected to be approximately 533 million tons of milled rice. This is less than earlier projections, but a significant increase in rice production will nevertheless be required to meet future needs. Moreover, although global rice projections do not anticipate deficits, they often mask regional or national shortfalls.

Pertinent issues

6. Several emerging issues may hinder the ability to meet future rice needs. Yield stagnation and limited land and water resources for expanding rice area are the most important constraints to sustainable rice production. Concerns about nutritional quality, genetic erosion and environmental degradation require more stringent choices in rice production, in particular choices under international commitment.

7. The present intensification of rice production has caused considerable damage to the environment and natural resources. Concern has increased with regard to "soil mining" for plant nutrients, decline in total productivity factor (outputs/inputs) and changes in the status of rice pests from minor to of major economic importance. The excessive use of agro-chemicals is causing water pollution and health hazards.

8. There is also concern that the spread of high-yielding varieties, with limited genetic diversity, erodes the diversity of rice. The intensive use of chemicals in rice production has greatly reduced the population of other plants, animals and micro-organisms, which traditionally thrived in rice fields and their surrounding environment. Biodiversity, is therefore, greatly reduced.

Challenges

9. The challenges of maintaining the productivity of rice production systems — depletion of natural resources, land lost to urban and industrial development, demographic pressure, erosion of genetic diversity in rice production systems and environmental issues — are too large for any single country, institution or organization to manage. A major international effort is therefore required that could be stimulated by the proclamation of an International Year of Rice by the United Nations.

10. With more than 800 million people suffering from chronic hunger, the declaration of 2004 as International Year of Rice would heighten awareness on the important role of rice in ensuring food security, poverty alleviation and the attainment of the Millennium development goals.

11. The proclamation of International Year of Rice, 2004 would also support calls for the promotion of national and international action in matters relating to the production, conservation distribution and consumption of rice and would address issues and concerns brought about by problems of declining productivity, depletion of natural resources and environment and losses of biodiversity within the present rice production systems. More importantly, an International Year of Rice would call attention to the important interrelationship between poverty, food security, malnutrition and rice.

Annex II

Draft resolution

International Year of Rice, 2004

The General Assembly,

Noting that rice is the staple food of more than half of the world's population,

Affirming the need to heighten awareness of the interrelationship between poverty, food security, malnutrition and rice,

Convinced that global focus on the role of rice is crucial to ensuring global food security, poverty alleviation and the attainment of the Millennium development goals,

Convinced also that concerted efforts should focus on addressing issues and challenges brought about by problems of declining productivity, depletion of natural resources and environment and losses of biodiversity in present rice production systems,

1. *Decides* to declare 2004 as the International Year of Rice;

2. *Invites* the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations to facilitate the implementation of the International Year of Rice, in collaboration with Governments, the United Nations Development Programme, the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research Centres and other relevant organizations of the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations.